5th Wednesday in Lent
West Henrietta - 1960

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. John 19: 16, 17 And they took Jesus and led Him away. And He bearing His Cross went forth into a place called the place of a Skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha.

BEARING THE CROSS

A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth! It is our Lord Christ. The death march along the Via Dolorosa has begun. Pilate, against His better judgment, had given the sentence: Take ye Him and crucify Him. Now there was no time to lose, lest the Roman Governor change His mind and order a stay of execution. Then too, those who loved this Jesus - His disciples - might suddenly get brave, organize themselves, and take the prisoner out of their hands. Surely, there was no time to lose. This Jesus had eluded them before, passing through their midst. It must not happen now. The soldiers, likewise, were in a hurry to be done with their job. At spear-point they mercilessly pushed Him along, causing Him to stumble and fall along the way. Listen to the words: And they took Jesus and led Him away. And He bearing His Cross went forth. The Cross He carries is not for Himself, but for us. This is our God, going to Golgotha to die for our sins. This is our God! Never forget that!

750 years before Isaiah had foretold it: He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter. At each step of the way He became weaker and weaker until finally He fell in His tracks. We need not be surprised at His utter exhaustion. For some twenty hours or more He had not had a wink of sleep. During that time He had undergone six unjust trials. And between those trials He had been beaten, abused by the coarse Roman soldiers, crowned with thorns, scourged by orders of Pilate. The Cross, laid on His bleeding, lacerated back, would make each jolt of that cross, as He staggered along, painful beyond endurance. But His collapse was not due to His physical sufferings alone. It was not the weight of the cross but the weight of our sins that bore His sacred body to the ground, for the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Your sins and my sins were heaped upon Him. Your sins and my sins added to the weight which crushed His soul. Your sins and mine were the real Cross which He carried to Calvary that day!

As the bleeding, wounded Savior thus staggered and stumbled along the Way of Sorrows, the soldiers grew increasingly more impatient to get at the real work of the crucifixion itself. You know the story. They picked on one Simon of Cyrene and forced him to carry the Cross of Jesus. Tradition has it that Simon might have been a Negro. At any rate, he had traveled many hundreds of miles from his hometown in Africa to worship God in the holy city of Jerusalem, and there to celebrate the Passover. Now, suddenly, he found himself under the weight of a cross. I can well imagine the disgust and resentment that must have gone through Simon's mind, when the soldiers compelled him to carry the Cross. Why did this have to happen to me? Why not someone else? I have come all this way to worship God in His holy temple, and look what I end up doing - carrying a disgraceful cross. Why? Why? Why? Undoubtedly, some of the hate-filled mob that made its way to Calvary that day passed some sneering remarks about Simon and his cross.

But God had great things in store for Simon of Cyrene through that Cross As he thus followed the Savior to Golgatha, he saw with his own eyes the marvelous love of God. He found God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. He heard the seven words of Jesus pierce the eery darkness of that Good Friday, and he knew that this was, in truth, the Son of God and Savior of the World - the long awaited Messiah. Because he carried the Cross of Jesus, he became a believer, and his sons, Alexander and Rufus, are later mentioned by St. Paul as being members of his congregation at Rome. Through that Cross he was eternally blessed!

Similarly, God in His great wisdom often places crosses upon us. Sometimes when we least expect it, one is laid upon us. Little did Simon think when he, perhaps out of curiosity, joined that mob who watched Christ carry His cross, that he himself would, in a few moments, be carrying that very same cross. And so it is with us. All is going well when we are suddenly and seriously injured in an auto accident. Or we are very happy and content in our little world when the telephone rings, informing us that a loved one has been called out of this life. Or we enjoy our children only to find one suddenly laid low with an illness

that baffles the best medical skill. Or we think that we are in the best of health, when an examination reveals that we are in need of major surgery. Or we feel secure in our work, only to find ourselves suddenly and swiftly out of a job. Or we may have all sorts of plans for the future only to find them blasted to bits by a series of unforeseen misfortunes. Like Simon, we stroll along on our journey of life, little thinking of a cross, only to find one suddenly thrust upon our shoulders. The world may laugh and make sport of the folly of our Christianity, but in the end we too shall learn that God has great things in store for us.

In humility we remember that the disciple is not above his Master. The words of our text come looming before our eyes: And He bearing His Cross went forth. The cost of discipleship runs high. The world did not hesitate to nail the Lord to the Cross. The world is no friendlier to Him today. The words of Jesus come echoing down the Centuries: If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. This is the reason why the church has such a hard time enlisting active and consecrated members. People don't mind being religious as long as religion doesn't cost them anything. Social pressure has in many cases made many Christians conform to popular ways of believing and living. But let a man break away from the crowd and stand up for his convictions, stand up for Jesus before his fellow men, and chances are he will be smiled away with contempt and declared a religious fanatic. Let a real cross come into his life, and he is apt to conclude that Christianity is worth nothing.

At such a time, it is well for us to remember that God brought good out of the Cross of Simon of Cyrene, and He redeemed the world through the Cross of Christ. And God will bring good out of our crosses. We know that the cross is a sign of God's love for us. If God gave His Son into death for our sins, then surely He means the best for us. He places the cross upon our backs with loving hands, and, what is more, He also gives us the strength to bear it. He tells us, as He told Paul who had his thorn in the flesh, that His grace is sufficient for us and that He strength is made perfect in weakness. Our crosses are meant to

strengthen our faith, to increase our love, to keep us humble, to purify our souls, to keep us on the path of righteousness. Under the weight of a cross we learn to known just how great our need is for God and His Christ, how little and insufficient we really are.

Whatever draws us closer to God is a blessing, no matter how much it is linked with heartache and sorrow. When we have learned that, we have learned one of the deep mysteries of the Christian life. Countless Christian people owe their salvation to the fact that God, in His mercy, laid a cross on their backs. Had they not had a cross, they would have continued in their own way of sin and unbelief. An old man was lying on his bed. He had been in bed or in a wheel chair for many long years. The sentence he liked to say most often was this one: God is good. A friend hearing him, asked, How can you say God is good, when you have had nothing but sickness and trouble so many years? The old man was quick to respond: Because I know that it was best for me. If I had been well, perhaps I should be dead now from drink, for I loved to drink. Perhaps I would have forgotten my God if I had not been sick. I don't know why God sent me this trouble, but I know that God is good. He died for me! Then isn't He good to me?

Dwight Moody, the great evangelist, relates that when he was a boy, his mother would send him outdoors to get a birch switch to whip him with when he was naughty. At first he used to stand as far away from the switch as he could. But he soon found out that the whipping hurt him more that way than any other. So he would get as close to his mother as possible and found that now she could not strike him so hard. And so, when God chastens us, let us kiss the cross He lays upon us and draw as close to Him as we can. One of the reasons why Job and Jeremiah, Paul and Luther were such great men of God is because they had such heavy crosses to bear.

The Arabs have a saying that all sunshine makes a desert. All sunshine would certainly leave our spiritual life barren. The Psalmist descovered long ago that cross-bearing can be profitable. He said, It is good for me that I have been afflicted! So let us say and believe! Amen.