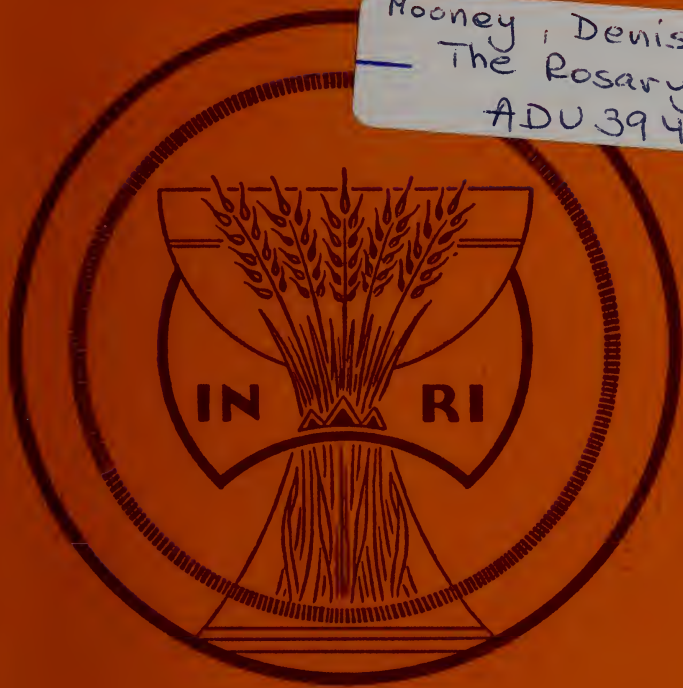


The Rosary

Mooney, Denis
— The Rosary ...
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and the Grain of Wheat

by Denis Mooney, O.F.M.

A GRAIL PUBLICATION

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INTRODUCTION

St. Augustine reminds us that what we do every day easily becomes commonplace —“*quotidiana vilescunt.*” The recitation of the Rosary is the daily, or at least frequent, practice of good Catholics and therefore, in order to preserve its vitality from the paralysis of routine one needs to acquire a lively appreciation of the divine significance of its Mysteries and draw nourishment from this excellent devotion through the personal application of its lessons.

It is characteristic of divine things to convey much by means of little. Thus the simple titles of the Mysteries of the Rosary confront each soul with the tremendous message of its Redemption; they offer to the mind the whole plan of salvation in fullness of outline and depth of meaning.

When our Lord spoke of this same divine plan He likewise conveyed the whole

idea of Redemption in a very simple and familiar example. He likened Himself, and anyone who would follow Him, to a grain of wheat planted in the ground: "Unless," He said, "the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it die, it brings forth much fruit" (John 12, 24-25).

Since both the devotion of the Rosary and the parable of the grain of wheat represent the same idea—a summary of the life, death and resurrection of the Redeemer—there should be an evident parallel between the development of the fifteen mysteries and the natural transformation of the grain of wheat. A clear picture of this relationship may prove very helpful in the appreciation and practical application of the Rosary.

There are three phases to the process by which the seed grain is brought to fruition. First, it is planted or sown in the soil; then it dies through the action of the elements of the earth, and finally, it flourishes into the new life of the harvest. The *sowing*, the *death* and the *har-*

rest are, therefore, the three steps in the process of sanctification illustrated so accurately and concretely by the Divine Teacher and these three phases, as we shall see, clearly correspond to the three stages in the life of the Redeemer represented by the *Joyful*, *Sorrowful* and *Glorious* Mysteries of the Rosary.

The Joyful Mysteries

For the grain of wheat to be sown, it must be sacrificed. This is done in the joyous time of spring with the cheerful generosity of the confident sower. The time when the farmer is engaged in sacrifice, that is, when he is casting away good grain into the soil, finds him joyful and light of heart because of his faith in the harvest to come.

Unspiritual Christians readily persuade themselves that sacrifice in the form of self-denial or mortification is a very gloomy and unattractive exercise of religion and, therefore, something to be shunned as much as possible. In principle they do not deny the Divine command to do penance, but in practice, because it seems unpleasant, they explain it away, to their own satisfaction, by insisting that one needs only to avoid mortal sin in or-

der to be saved. That, of course, is true, but to remain in the state of grace for any considerable length of time is normally possible to fallen human nature only when that nature cooperates with grace and directs the will to God by the discipline of self-denial. Therefore, it would be more to the point for such Christians to ask themselves if they *are* avoiding sin, and if not then they need to apply the remedy and attack the cause of sin, which is the natural tendency to self-indulgence.

The will of worldly souls goes out to creatures more than to God and, therefore, they are reluctant to give up any more of what they love than is absolutely necessary. So they reduce penance or voluntary sacrifice to the vanishing point and pamper fallen nature with pleasure.

Earnest Christians, on the other hand, while making use of the creatures they need in living for God, see in them the means of proving their love for God. They use the world of creatures as a treasury from which to draw generous gifts of love in the form of sacrifice and

thereby to show their preference for God, just as the farmer shows his desire for the harvest by his eagerness to sacrifice the grain in the spring. "He who sows bountifully," says St. Paul, "will also reap bountifully" (II Cor. 9, 6). And what have we to sow, but the needless pleasures of the world? Sacrifice undoubtedly is irksome to nature, but faith and love can make it a joy.

It would be strange, indeed, if penance should be regarded as gloomy and unnecessary by those who give unhesitating and warm approval to the devotion of the holy Rosary, for the Mysteries which we call *Joyful* are completely taken up with the sacrifice of love and they are intended to teach us the same spirit.

The redemptive plan revealed to us by Jesus is not something merely to be believed in and admired from afar; it is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" for every redeemed soul. Therefore, each of us must strive to re-live the Christ-life of the Rosary; we must desire to become as grains of wheat; otherwise we shall fail

to spend our lives in the way outlined for us by our Lord, and instead of destroying by sacrifice, we shall foster by pleasure those natural inclinations which lead us away from Christ and dispose us to sin.

1. THE ANNUNCIATION



The first Joyful Mystery of the Annunciation recalls the first event in the plan of Redemption. The Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to ask of Mary the total offering of herself to the divine purposes. On being advised of God's plan, Mary unhesitatingly and joyfully *planted* herself in the holy Will of God with the memorable words: "Be it done unto me according to Thy word." That was the Blessed Virgin's act of complete surrender and self-offering. Through her knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures she undoubtedly had a general, though obscure, idea of the suffering involved in the Messianic ma-

ternity, yet she made no reservation or restriction of her self-donation to God.

This was the starting point of the work of the Holy Ghost in forming Jesus in the Blessed Virgin. As soon as she gave herself wholeheartedly to God by the unreserved act of her free will, then God came to her in the Incarnate Word Whom she conceived in the womb.

Mary, being our mother—the mother of all the redeemed—also planted us, her children, potentially in the will of God by her *fiat*. Now it rests with us to make this *sowing* of ourselves an actuality by a personal act of our free will, by offering ourselves, likewise without reservation, to God.

The mystery of the Annunciation has to be reenacted in every Christian life by the unqualified acceptance of the Great Commandment to love God with the whole heart. The universal obligation of perfection requires every Christian to *plant* himself in the holy will of God by an act of self-surrender. This is the starting point of the activity of the Holy Spirit in de-

veloping the soul in the likeness of Christ.

The recitation of the first Mystery of the Rosary, therefore, should inspire in us a renewal of determination to strive earnestly towards personal perfection. It should be a reminder that the effort merely to avoid what is sinful is negative, loveless and impractical. It was not Mary's way and, therefore, is not the Christian way.

If the devotion of the holy Rosary were followed with more supernatural understanding and personal application, there would be less occasion for the lament of the saints, of the Popes and spiritual writers, that so few Christians realize their positive duty of aiming consistently at the spiritual objective of perfection.

2. THE VISITATION



The evangelist relates that immediately after the Annunciation "Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country" in

order to visit her cousin Elizabeth. The Archangel Gabriel had told her that Elizabeth was soon to have a child and Mary, no doubt, was eager to be of assistance to the household. An infallible sign of a wholehearted love for God is the yearning to bring God to others, the desire to *sow* or sacrifice oneself in the interests of one's neighbor through the spiritual and corporal works of mery.

Christians who realize the meaning of the commandment to love God with the whole heart and who dispose themselves to the action of the indwelling Holy Spirit, soon begin to lose interest in the personal and worldly concerns that formerly seemed so important and necessary. There comes an ardent desire to occupy themselves in works of charity—to visit the sick and needy; to instruct the ignorant; to pray for the living and the dead. Their joy is no longer in the pleasures that creatures may afford, but in *sowing* themselves in the field of God's poor and sick and needy. They find, of course, that this field is reached only through the "hill

country" of obstacles, of disappointment and opposition, but like Mary, they make haste with joy.

Conversely, those Christians whose love for God is only on their lips and not in their hearts; those who spend their lives trying to please themselves while vaguely hoping not to displease God and incur His punishments, pay little or no heed to the works of mercy, except perhaps to give an occasional and paltry alms. Yet the personal works of charity are necessary to the Christian life. In the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, our Lord tells us that the judgment of souls will be made according to the service of Christ in the poor, the hungry, the sick and the imprisoned.

Personal works of charity are the medium of the Christian apostolate by which the love of Christ is enkindled in souls, and so the evangelist goes on to tell us, "when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe in her womb leaped. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."

Such is the marvellous sanctifying effect

that God produces through human instruments. John the Baptist is purified in his mother's womb by the presence of Christ in Mary. The last prophet of the Old Law is sanctified by the first Priest of the New Law and Mary becomes our model as the Queen of Apostles.

God still seeks to accomplish His apostolate through every Christian. By our very presence among them, pagans should experience Christ in and through us by our works of charity, by seeing our virtue, our other-worldliness and our love for one another: "So let your light shine before men," said our Lord, "that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven" (Matt. 5, 16).

The Mystery of the Visitation is to be re-lived in our own lives so that we bring Christ to others. To do so, however, we need the mentality of Mary. For her there was only one purpose in life, one motive for conduct. It was "God alone"; "All for Jesus," and, therefore, sacrifice was merely the joyful language of her love.

We must learn from Mary the necessity

of forming a supernatural mentality in order to consider all things from the viewpoint of pleasing God and of expressing this disposition in the practical form of zeal for the spiritual and temporal welfare of our neighbor. We must *plant* ourselves with Mary in the fertile soil of Christian charity.

3. THE NATIVITY



The third Joyful Mystery introduces our divine Saviour into the world in the very atmosphere of sacrifice. He *sows* the glory of His divinity, as it were, in the total obscurity of His humanity. Or as St. Paul expresses it, "He emptied Himself, taking the nature of a slave and being made like unto men" (Phil. 2, 7). This is He Who is to preach the joyful and blessed Gospel summarized in the Sermon on the Mount, and so for our example He first lives the doctrine He is going to preach, as St.

Luke records of Him: "Jesus began to do and to teach" (Acts 1, 1).

By the environment which our Lord chose for His rebirth, He expressed concretely the mode of life He was later to teach, and, therefore, meditation on the Nativity puts before the mind a living tableau of the Beatitudes. The essential message of the Beatitudes is *joy in the sacrifice of love*. They call for poverty of spirit, for meekness, for hunger after God and for patient suffering; yet, each appeal for self-sacrifice is prefixed with the joyous word of blessedness.

When the angels discovered their Lord in the poverty and suffering of the manger, they burst into song from sheer delight. This obviously was not the joy of the world, for there was nothing there for the enjoyment of the senses. It was a supernatural experience known only to what is spiritual. So we can understand, love and delight in the ways of God; we can find peace in the teaching and example of Christ only if we live by the spirit of God and not by principles that

are worldly and sensual. "The sensual man," says St. Paul, "does not perceive the things that are of the spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him and he cannot understand, because it is examined spiritually" (I Cor. 2, 14).

If we who recite the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary would share in true joy, we shall find it only by translating into personal practice the Gospel of our Lord—the Sermon on the Mount. The angels will sing for us, that is, we shall experience true happiness, the spiritual joy of the interior life, when they can look into our hearts and discover Jesus in the same environment in which they found Him at Bethlehem. Where there has been an "Annunciation" of true love for God and a "Visitation" of practical love of neighbor; where there is a "Bethlehem" of poverty of spirit, of meekness, of a yearning for the things of God and a cheerful endurance of suffering, there Jesus will make His abode and there the angels of spiritual peace will sing.

The worldly soul, with a natural and

sensual mind, knows nothing of such spiritual joy and shuns all voluntary sacrifice. It keeps itself occupied with the interests and passing fancies of the day and becomes absorbed to a greater or lesser degree by attachments to creature-pleasures (with the excuse, of course, that they are not forbidden) and thus keeps the door of the affections closed to Jesus just like the door of the inn in the town of Bethlehem. It was *business* and *pleasure*, not just sin, that occupied the people of the inn and these same worldly preoccupations still blind the souls of many Christians to keep them from recognizing Christ and inviting Him into their hearts with the welcome of prayer and sacrifice.

Reflection on the Mystery of the Birth of our Saviour should urge us to form our lives according to the divine program of the Sermon on the Mount and find our joy where Jesus found it, and not seek it in any vanities or pomps of the world which we solemnly renounced at Baptism.



4. THE PRESENTATION

By the Mystery of the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple the truth of *joy in sacrifice* is again impressed on the mind. It is called a joyful mystery and yet it meant for Mary the sacrifice or *sowing* of her divine Treasure in the will of God. The Holy Child was everything to her and yet she generously and unreservedly offered Him back to God just as a farmer gives back to the soil the best of the grain he has received from it.

What Mary knew of her coming cross, of the price she would pay in the Redemption, we do not know, but undoubtedly she was aware of her call to a life of great human sorrow, as Simeon told her with the words, "Thy own soul a sword shall pierce" (Luke 2, 35). She was called to offer her only Son in a complete sacrifice to God. Yet—we call it a *Joyful Mystery*.

The Presentation in the Temple was the first liturgical offering of the New Law—a prelude to the sacrifice of the Cross. Simeon was there, as the priest; Jesus was the Victim; the arms of Mary were the altar of sacrifice, and the congregation was represented in Anna.

For every Christian the Mystery of the Presentation should become a personal reality in the Offertory of the Mass, for it is there that the priest offers us to God through Mary in union with her Son.

In meditating on this Mystery we must cherish the conviction that self-sacrifice is the real proof of Christian love and the key to the understanding of our part in the sacrifice of the Mass. Any prejudice that penance or self-abnegation is negative, unnecessary and cheerless will strip the Joyful Mysteries of their meaning and discourage all personal application.

Our love for God is tested by our deeds, not our words, and, therefore, any prayer of self-oblation that we may make in our *Presentation* at the Offertory of the Mass must be transposed into the action of daily

life. When reciting the fourth Joyful Mystery we might well ask ourselves what we have to offer; what practical evidence can we give of our co-victimhood with Christ; what have we given to Mary to be presented with her Son.

The spiritual *presentation* of ourselves takes its value and its joy not from the prayers on our lips, but from the love in our hearts—a love which is alert to the will of the Beloved and grows in the recognition that life's daily circumstances afford innumerable opportunities for offering gifts of love; gifts of the crosses accepted by the patient endurance of annoyance, of misunderstandings, of unkindness and of pain; gifts of pleasures renounced or used only for God's glory. Notwithstanding our pious words, we cannot present to God the crosses which our rebellious self-love has thrown away, nor the pleasures which our self-indulgence has consumed needlessly for the mere sake of pleasure.

If we say in prayer every morning that we offer to God all our actions of the day,

then we oblige ourselves to make a serious effort to *live* that offering, to make it into practice by correcting our natural selfish tendencies, by striving to withdraw our affections from worldly things and to *form the habit* of pleasing God. One act of the will does not change a habit of the mind and actions which are naturally permeated with self-interest, with spiritual idleness and love for creatures are not made acceptable to God merely by a word.

The Presentation should convince us of the necessity of *living* the offering we make in prayer.

5. THE FINDING OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE



We may readily appreciate why the recovery of the Divine Child after being lost for three days is called a *Joyful* Mystery, yet here again it is a joy only at the price of sacrifice.

Mary and Joseph were returning to Nazareth from Jerusalem in the company of their friends and relatives, enjoying the security, companionship and comparative conveniences of such a caravan. Then they discovered that the Holy Child was not among their kinsfolk, as they had supposed. To return to Jerusalem to find Him meant the sacrifice of all the conveniences of their party and the retracing of a day's journey on foot. Although it was not a pleasant prospect, there was no hesitation. Their love for Jesus was a love of preference—a love which impelled them to sacrifice all else for Him.

Our Lord, on His part, by remaining behind gave His parents the opportunity to express in reality the spirit of detachment which He had come to teach: "Whoever does not renounce all that he possesses cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14, 33).

The intense sorrow of Mary and Joseph on losing Jesus, their anxiety in searching for Him and their great joy in finding Him were proportioned to their love for Him.

Their love in turn was as measureless as their complete self-sacrifice.

Consideration of this Mystery should be a constant reminder and inspiration for us to value and protect the gift of sanctifying grace, which is the presence of Jesus in us, and to seek eagerly for opportunities to increase our spiritual possession of Christ.

Should it happen that, through human frailty or momentary weakness, we should suffer the misfortune of losing the life of grace by serious sin, we should realize from this Mystery that our sorrow, our search and joy of recovery through Confession will be proportioned to the love we have for Jesus; the subjective and abiding disposition of love—a love that is valued by what we have sacrificed for our Lord. A worldly soul gives little or nothing for Jesus, and without cost there is no value and without value there is no sense of loss; thus, true contrition is difficult for the pleasure-lover and Confession for such a soul becomes superficial and routine.

Some Christians have put so little value on the presence of Christ that they leave their soul in sin without God for weeks or months, satisfied perhaps to confess only at Eastertime. How can such Christians be said to love God? Suppose the Blessed Virgin had said to St. Joseph: "To return to Jerusalem now is rather inconvenient. Let us go on with the caravan. We can look for our Son next Easter when we return to Jerusalem to celebrate the Pasch." Such an attitude is inconceivable, yet many Christians act in that manner while protesting that they love God.

Only those who have paid for the possession of Jesus in the coin of self-sacrifice will guard and cherish the state of grace, and if, as is then unlikely, it should be lost through momentary weakness, their love will search Him out with sorrow; rejoicing only when He is found again in the Sacrament of Penance.

It is important to dwell on the fact that Jesus was found in the *Temple*, for we must not expect to find Him in places

of *worldly* amusement. We shall experience the joy of His company in the temple of prayer and sacrifice.

The Sorrowful Mysteries

The divine illustration of the grain of wheat provides us with a clear answer to the vexing question: "Why must we suffer?"

It is the law of all things in the natural and the spiritual order that for something to be taken up to a higher state of existence it must suffer the process of change. For the minerals of the soil to be raised to the life of vegetation they must surrender their own form; be crushed by the root and utilized by the life of the plant. The plant in turn can be elevated to the plane of animal life only by the same painful process of assimilation. In a similar way man gathers up all the lower forms of creation and brings them up to the human level by the pain of transformation and assimilation. This proces-

sion back to God up the steps of His creation does not end with man. He is destined for union with God and therefore he, too, must surrender his own natural mode of existence in order to be assimilated by grace and to be conformed to the divine manner of life. Nature must give in to grace; self-love must give way to love for God, but in the process nature suffers because it resents the discomfort of being changed. God does not want us to suffer, but because He loves us He does want us to be transformed and to become "like unto Him." The pain is simply the price of the change—a price *self-imposed* on nature by original sin.

Sacred Scripture tells us repeatedly that we must die to ourselves if we are to live for God, but to a mind that judges things merely by darkened human reason and not by faith, the idea of "dying to the natural," as the spiritual writers express it, is sheer folly. Such a mind argues that God has given us our nature with all our physical and mental powers, and the introduction of sanctifying grace in Baptism

elevates these faculties to the supernatural order and makes our actions pleasing to God. That is only a half truth, for while spiritualizing our faculties grace does not automactically direct the free will to God, nor destroy the inherent self-love which can infect the best of our actions. We must turn our affections to God; we must consent to die to the merely natural *mode* of life, so that grace may assume control and jurisdiction of our activity.

The pain of "dying" repels the natural mind because it lacks the faith and spiritual vision to trust in the joy of the new life. All suffering, says St. Paul, "seems for the present to be a matter not for joy but for grief; but afterwards it yields the most peaceful fruit of justice" (Heb. 12, 11). In another place St. Paul evidently has in mind the same illustration of the grain of seed to explain the purpose of suffering when he says: "Even though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (II Cor. 4, 16).

Darkened and unaided reason is not

willing to subscribe to the divine principle that the new life in Christ can flourish only on the death of the old life of self, and, therefore, the Apostle warns us that God's ways are folly to the worldly mind: "The sensual man," he says, "does not perceive the things that are of the spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him and he cannot understand (I Cor. 2, 14).

We need a well-developed spirit of faith to accept our Lord's doctrine of the *Folly of the Cross* outlined in the Sorrowful Mysteries and clearly illustrated in the parable of the grain of wheat.

1. THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN



When the grain of seed is dropped into the soil, it is soon surrounded by the elements of the earth which press in upon it to aid in its transformation. If the seed were without the germ of new life, the elements would break it down layer by

layer and convert it into the likeness of the soil. But because of the germ within the seed, the soil is made to play a very different role—to cooperate in the natural process of the destruction, assimilation and transmutation of the old nature of the grain into the new nature of the plant. While the outer form is decaying, the germ of new life is stirring to intense activity and sends out tiny roots into the surrounding elements to draw from them the very ingredients of its new growth into the harvest.

This is the divine, and therefore perfect, illustration of our Lord's Agony in the Garden, for it was of His sufferings that He said: "Unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone, but if it die it brings forth much fruit" (John 12, 24-25). He was "dropped" by the Father, so to speak, into the elements of this world. He did not belong to it, as He said of Himself: "I am not of this world" (John 17, 16). The world opposed Him because He was different; because He was poor in spirit, humble and

selfless. His manner of life was a reproach to those who loved the world, and, therefore, the world would seek to crush Him into its own likeness. The pressure of man's unholiness came with such overwhelming force that it drove the blood through the pores of His sacred Body.

Meanwhile, the germ of the new life of Redemption was at work. In the painful circumstances of His Passion, in the soil of His sufferings, He recognized the will of His loving Father and He sent forth the "roots" of love to draw out the grace of new life for us all. The very manner of accomplishing His death was, at the same time, in the plan of Divine Providence, the occasion to tap the resources of nourishment for life and love.

Every Christian soul has received the germ of divine life in Baptism, but the old form of self-love, like the grain of seed, is not thereby destroyed. If the inner life is to grow into the harvest of sanctification, the outer "self" must consent to die. In so doing, the very action which accomplishes its annihilation is enlisted to

cooperate in the assimilation of the old spirit by the new.

As soon as a Christian begins to express the divine, to show the signs of the inner Christ-life by striving to live the Gospel of meekness and other-worldliness, of detachment from creatures, he puts himself unwittingly in contrast to the spirit of the world. He is *in* the world, but not wishing to be *of* it, he does not subscribe to its vanities, its cravings for transitory pleasures and luxuries and, therefore, his mode of life and his ideas became a reproach to lovers of comfort. Speaking to His disciples and to us, Jesus declared: "If you were of the world, the world would love what is its own. But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15, 19).

The spiritual destiny of every Christian is to be worked out in his own "Garden of Gethsemane" where the outer man of self decays and the inner man of grace is renewed unto fullness of life; in the garden of his daily sacrifices where created

pleasures persecute the mortified senses by their very attractiveness; in the olive-grove of daily sufferings where the loving Hand of Divine Providence directs all things, even the wicked forces of the world, to purify His elect.

Meditation on the Mystery of our Lord's Agony in the Garden should teach us to discover in the soil of our circumstances the will of God and the material of our glory. If we accept God's will by patient, meek, and cheerful endurance our inner life will be nourished by the grace that is concealed in our trials. "Where there is no love," says St. John of the Cross, "let us put love and *we shall draw out love.*"

2. THE SCOURGING AT THE PILLAR



In the process of its conversion into a seedling, the grain of wheat is broken down layer by layer until its store of ener-

gy is entirely absorbed and put to new purpose by the life principle of the plant. So with our Lord, the Divine "Grain of Wheat," all the faculties of His human nature, His corporal senses, His judgment, His will and finally His very existence are assailed successively by His enemies in the course of His passion. The process begins with the attack on His external senses in the Scourging at the Pillar.

By submitting to the frightful pain of the lashes Jesus consents to die to the sense of touch. He Who had taught His followers not to be solicitous about the things of this life: He Who professed such disregard for the pleasure of creatures as to declare: "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Luke 9, 58), now manifests in the drastic lesson of the Scourging His complete detachment from the comforts of this life.

The natural joy of the sense of sight is surrendered too. His eyes were made for heaven and they were not to be captivated by the attractive sights of earth and so He permits His human sight to be morti-

fied in the extreme. He can see about Him only enemies, blood and ugliness. His hearing, attuned to the adoration of angels and the harmonies of the universe, is filled now with the curses and blasphemies of the brutal soldiers. His faculty of smell, so delicately sensitive to the spiritual odor of holiness, is now assailed by the carnal stench of the Roman ruffians. He consents to die to the natural use of speech, for He utters no word of reproach or resentment as He fulfills the words of the Prophet: "He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before His shearer, and He shall not open His mouth" (Is. 53, 7).

This is the astonishing lesson that the Master gives His followers on the necessity of dying to the external senses. The corporal faculties are the avenues by which the spirit of the world can gain entrance to the soul, fostering the life of the senses and stifling the life of the spirit. To safeguard the interior life of grace from the paralyzing effect of the spirit of the world and to allow the energies of divine love to

exert their influence in the soul, the doors to the world must be closed by a spirit of detachment from creatures, that is, the affections must not be allowed to spend themselves on the objects of the senses merely for the satisfaction which creatures can give. Otherwise, nature is being transformed by the "soil" of creatures into the likeness of the creatures instead of "dying" to them and being assimilated by grace. "It must be known," says St. John of the Cross, "that the attachment that the soul has for creatures renders the soul like to these creatures. . . . Love not only makes the lover equal to the object of his love, but even subjects him to it" (*Ascent I*, 4).

A strong attachment to a needless creature-pleasure (such an attachment is not infrequently revealed by the expression: "I am dying for this or that") means that nature is trying to *live for* certain pleasures instead of *dying to* them.

For our senses to die to the world and to serve the interests of grace, we must acquire a spirit of holy indifference to the

pleasure of using creatures, in order to use them as God intends, not for our glory, but as a means of knowing, loving and serving Him.

To share in the sufferings of Christ at the Pillar it is not sufficient merely to *resolve* to accept the scourge of suffering in the future. We must prepare beforehand by self-imposed discipline and restraint, just as an athlete must train in advance if he is to endure the strain of the contest, as St. Paul says: "Everyone in a contest abstains from all things" (I Cor. 9, 25). Our Lord also made it clear that anyone who would come after Him must deny himself *first* if he would be ready to take up the daily cross. Neglect of the practice of detachment from material things explains why there is so much complaining, even among otherwise good Christians, about any trifling circumstance that is disagreeable to the senses. Being pampered with needless comforts and material gratifications, they are not disciplined and are far from "dead" to creatures, and, therefore, they rebel at any

suffering and show little resemblance to the mortified senses of Jesus at the Pillar.

In reflecting on this Sorrowful Mystery it is of no practical help to be mere witnesses to the brutality of the Scourging. We are to be co-sufferers, associating ourselves with Jesus, learning to die to our corporal senses by practicing at least such penance as is necessary to restrain our desires from attaching themselves to any creature merely for the gratification it affords.

3. THE CROWNING WITH THORNS



Having destroyed the outer shell of the seed, the soil continues its work of breaking down the inner structure of the grain to aid in its transformation by the germ of new life.

So the spirit of the world, after having assailed the exterior faculties of our Lord's

human nature, brings its action to bear on the first inner faculty of His natural life—His human judgment. Our Lord is ridiculed and crowned with thorns in mockery.

The natural use of the intellect or, as it is called, "common sense," is very precious to the human personality. Independently of grace, it is the guide for the natural life. But folly and unfairness are abominations to this human judgment, and therefore, to accept them without bitterness and resentment the intellect must be "dead" to mere human standards of judgment.

To teach us the necessity of using our intelligence divinely, of judging all things in the light of the divine wisdom of faith and not by the standards of mere human reason, which is the wisdom of this world, our Lord permitted His human judgment to be mortified by the unreasonableness, mockery and injustice to which His divine Majesty was subjected.

The Crowning of our Blessed Lord with thorns should serve as a constant reminder

to us that if we are to follow Him Who suffered for our example, if we are to "walk by faith and not by sight," as St. Paul says, we must expect to have our "common sense" crossed and contradicted by the seeming stupidity and injustice that often assails us in daily life. God permits, and often ordains, that these things happen to us, as they happened to His Divine Son, in order to break down our pagan mind and strengthen our faith.

St. Peter calls it our "Christian vocation" to suffer unjustly. "What is the glory," he says, "if when you sin and are buffeted, you endure it? But if, when you do right and suffer, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. Unto this, indeed, you have been called" (I Peter 2, 20).

We shall not be prepared to fulfill our "vocation" unless we change our natural mentality and bring our intellectual power under the direction of faith. Unless we are dead to our selfish way of seeing things we shall not remain silent as our Lord did; we shall react with resentment,

criticism and complaint whenever the ideas or actions of other people are opposed to our own. How often we say about the conduct of others towards us "there is no sense in it," or "it is unfair and unreasonable and, therefore, intolerable."

There was "no sense" in the mocking conduct of the soldiers and the rabble in crowning Jesus with thorns, but He did not deserve such treatment in return, but He said nothing. Had He been guided by our poor human judgment or "common sense" He would have protested vehemently against such injustice. But He was directed by a divine light, a light that is given to us by faith, and which discovered for Him the divine wisdom of His Father's will concealed behind the screen of human folly.

Meditation on the Sorrowful Mystery of the Crowning with Thorns should teach us how necessary it is to acquire a spirit of faith, to "put on the mind of Christ," in order to recognize spontaneously and to accept graciously the divine wisdom of

our personal sanctification in the seeming unreasonableness, the peculiarities or the folly of people and events around us.

4. THE CARRYING OF THE CROSS



Just as the surrounding elements of the soil continue to break down the grain of seed and penetrate soon to its very heart, so the enemies of our Lord continue their assault upon Him, and now lay siege to the inner citadel of His human nature. They call for the surrender of His human will through obedience. A cross is placed upon the shoulders of Jesus—the symbol of total subjection. Jesus accepts it meekly, signifying that He is dead to His own will and that He submits entirely to His Father's good pleasure.

It is quite contrary to human nature to submit with docility to authorities who exercise power in an arbitrary and unjust fashion. Yet our Lord was obedient to

the jealous highpriest, to the lustful Herod, to the scheming Pilate and to the brutal soldiers, because He recognized that they were merely instruments used by the Father to test His love and submission and to win the grace of Redemption.

The Father did not cause, nor did He want, the hateful sin of these men; they were free agents. God simply placed His Son in the path of their free actions. Our Lord respected the power of these superiors because, as He said, "it came from above," and He obeyed without regard to the character of the visible instruments used by the Invisible Authority. He had foreseen that all things would be arranged by His Father, for He had said: "Shall I not drink the cup that *my Father has given me?*" (John 18, 11).

The cross of obedience is placed by Divine Providence on the shoulder of every Christian. It comes as the medium of spiritual purification to destroy the natural tendency to self-will.

Whenever there is legitimate authority, there is the will of God. The person who

exercises the power is simply the "outward sign" concealing the "inward grace" of the Divine Will. Just as we need a doctrinal faith to pierce the veil of bread and to adore Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, so also we need a practical faith, a Christian mentality, to penetrate the human qualities of our superiors and adore the will of God manifested through them. As we bow profoundly before Jesus, whether in the large Host at the Consecration or in the small Host at the Communion of the Mass, so we must honor the divine Will expressed in authority without regard to whether the visible person is kind or unkind, just or unjust, wise or foolish. It is not for us to judge God's instruments, nor to choose the manner of our "dying," but to submit in all things to the holy Will of God. "Be subject to your masters in all fear, not only to the good and moderate, but also to the severe" are the words of the Holy Spirit through St. Peter (I Peter 2, 18).

Meditation on the Fourth Sorrowful Mystery should convince us of the need of

adjusting our mind to the way of God so as to recognize always in the superiors and laws directing us an expression of God's adorable will. Then we shall seize every opportunity to die to our own will through perfect obedience—that is blind to the human qualities of visible authority and alert to the sanctifying will of the Invisible God.

5. THE CRUCIFIXION



The grain of wheat, having perished layer by layer to its very core, now enters the last phase of destruction—the surrender of its life *as a seed*. So our Lord, having died to the natural desires of His senses, of His judgment and His will, now upon the Cross, yields up His human life in the culminating act of His passion.

The Fifth Sorrowful Mystery presents the crucified figure of our Lord as the Redeemer and reveals the Cross to fallen

humanity as the key to eternal life and the remedy for the world's catastrophe of selfishness and sin. The Cross proclaims to all Christians that, having received the germ of divine life in Baptism, they must be "crucified to the world" if there is to be a growth in grace.

The Crucifixion points the way to the true form of Christian living. Christianity is not, as many seem to suppose, merely an assent to revealed doctrines joined with a vague hope of avoiding sin, and certainly it does not consist in attendance at certain religious functions. It is a complete way of life; a supernatural manner of living that can flourish only on the death of the natural mode of life. If we realize this we shall also become aware that the greatest menace to Christianity and to our personal spiritual life is not necessarily an open attack on some particular doctrine or practice; the menace, too, is more likely to be a way of life, a mentality, a spirit. It is, in fact, the subtle spirit of the world which is able to stifle the life of grace and dispose the soul to sin; it is the nat-

ural, selfish, pagan mentality that expresses itself in a craze for pleasure and a shrinking from pain; a love of comfort and a disregard of penance; a worship of creatures and consequent forgetfulness of God.

By Baptism Christians are sealed with the Sign of the Cross; "They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires," (Gal. 5, 24) but the popular craving for pleasure and the vanities of life marks many so-called Christians with the countersign of the world.

The remedy for the spirit of the world is the mentality of Christ Crucified, hence the Apostle says: "But we, for our part, preach a crucified Christ" (I Cor. 1, 23). The Cross is shunned because its pain seems to usurp the place of pleasure; pain is wasted because it is seen only in itself and not for what it earns. The soil of suffering is regarded as merely destructive of nature, whereas, in truth, it purifies and prepares nature for the transforming power of the inner life of grace.

St. Paul impresses on us time and again the purpose and value of suffering and he rejoices in his own tribulations. St. James even begins his Epistle with the remarkable words: "Esteem it all joy, my brethren, when you fall into various trials."

God is not responsible for our pain; it is man's own contribution to this world. Our Lord did not bring suffering into the world; He found it here as the soil into which He was "planted" and in which He took root, was nourished and grew out of death into the life of Redemption.

Meditation on the Crucifixion should teach us how to use suffering for our sanctification; how to be at peace in spite of pain and even because of it, as were all the Saints. Suffering accepted out of love for God is pain only for the moment; the sign of the new life and new joy that rises from the death of self. "Our present light affliction, which is for the moment," says St. Paul, "prepares for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure" (II Cor. 4, 17).

The Glorious Mysteries

The *sowing* and the *death* of the seed do not mark its end. They really herald its beginning, for now the grain is about to realize its tremendous potentialities of new life. So in the plan of the Rosary, the sacrifice of the Joyful Mysteries and the suffering of the Sorrowful are only stages of development which take their meaning and their value from the new life of the Glorious Mysteries.

Sacrifice and suffering are not ends in themselves; they are only means or steps to the freedom and glory of the spiritual life. But the worldly man, more or less preoccupied with the life of the senses which thrives on creature-pleasures, prefers to ignore the presence of the inner life of the spirit, a life which thrives on the Cross. He convinces himself with many specious reasons that spiritual joy

belongs in the next life and is unattainable on earth. He refuses to believe in what he has not yet experienced, the joy of walking in the "newness of life" on earth, and so he contends that God wants us to make the best of this world of material things and indulge in any of all *legitimate* pleasures according to our natural desires. While this may be a very attractive sort of religion for our fallen nature, there is nothing in the teaching of Christ or His Saints to show that this is the way that leads to glory.

We should learn from the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary that we may anticipate the peace and happiness of Heaven and experience in some measure the glory of the new life of the spirit even here on earth. But we must be willing to change the direction of our actions away from self to God in order to be conformed to the supernatural mode of life outlined and lived by Jesus Who said: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9, 23). To follow Jesus is to share in His glory.

It is remarkable that an age which welcomes change and is ever ready to overthrow any tradition or heritage of the past will not consent to a change where it is most needed. We need a change of heart, a new mentality. We must adjust ourselves to the mind and heart of Christ in order to have His sense of values, to view things as He viewed them, to love what He loved and to despise what He despised. Yet we cling to our natural mentality. We allow our judgments to be formed and guided by the principles of the world as it continually pours its subtle propaganda of pleasure into our lives through such appealing channels as the press, the radio and the movies. Such influence overwhelms and devastates the spirit. We accept it because we lack faith and love for God.

Frequent considerations of the Glorious Mysteries will give us the perspective of glory and convince us of the reality of the interior life. It will inspire us to release the pent-up energies of spiritual joy in the soul by "dying" to the attractions of the world.

1. THE RESURRECTION



No sooner has the grain of seed given itself over to death than the first sign of the new life appears. By its own inner power the seedling breaks through the surface of the soil. This is the first guarantee of the manifold exchange of the harvest; the first visible proof that death was not in vain.

So our Lord, the divine "Grain of Wheat," was not long buried before He burst the bonds of the Tomb to give the first proof of Redemption in His glorious Resurrection. He appeared to the world in a new life.

Jesus did not ascend to Heaven immediately but remained on earth for forty days in His resurrected form, manifesting to the faithful the remarkable qualities of His glorified state of body and soul. He wanted to attract us to the happiness of

the new life of the Spirit—a life freed from the fetters of attachment to the things of earth.

A Christian who consents to die to the “natural” life begins to live in the new life of the supernatural. “We are buried together with Him by Baptism unto death,” says St. Paul, “so we also may walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6, 4). Such a soul, adjusting mind and heart to the gift of sanctifying grace, begins to acquire a new outlook on life, to have a new sense of values and to develop its natural powers in a supernatural way.

In the state of glory in heaven the soul will rejoice to be absorbed in the contemplation of God and will have no interest in anything that is not God, and so the spiritual soul on earth begins to delight in divine things and lose desire for the transient things of the world. To a mind preoccupied with God, the pleasurable things of creation are seen simply as reflections of the glory that is to come in the possession of God. Their presence and utility here on earth, instead of claiming

the soul's attention and indulgence, serve only to raise the mind still more to God. The soul that is truly risen with Christ seeks "the things that are above, not the things that are on the earth" (Col. 3, 1).

The glorified body in Heaven no longer suffers, and so the "risen" soul on earth learns to look on sufferings with joy. Trials are seen as God-given opportunities of achieving holiness and everlasting joy, as the Apostle declares: "Our present light affliction, which is for the moment, prepares for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure, while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen" (II Cor. 4, 17-18). Suffering, regarded formerly by the natural mind as an obstacle to the desire of pleasing self, is now embraced as an opportunity of pleasing God. St. Francis of Assisi reckoned true joy to consist in suffering rejection and maltreatment from his own brethren. Such a sense of values is incomprehensible to a *natural* mind simply because it is natural and will not consent to the old spirit being crucified.

By earnest meditation on the attractiveness of our Lord in His glorious Resurrection we shall cultivate, like the Saints, a great desire for the spiritual qualities of body and soul which belong to the "newness of life."

2. THE ASCENSION



Although the new-sprung blade of wheat is the guarantee of the harvest, it must come to its full growth before yielding its fruit.

In His Resurrection, our Lord gave us the foundation and guarantee of our faith in Redemption, but He comes to His full stature as Redeemer, reaching from earth to Heaven, when He returns to His Father in the Ascension: "It is expedient for you that I go," He said, "for if I go not the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you" (John 16, 7).

Our Lord's Ascension was a miracle of astonishing character and supreme significance and yet it was accomplished in the most simple manner and related by St. Luke in a word. There is no account of singing angels, no darkening of the sun, no breaking of rocks; merely that "he was lifted up and a cloud took Him out of their sight" (Acts 1, 9). It was accomplished with such facility because it was the normal achievement of His supernatural powers, just as a seed naturally comes to the full development of its species. While Jesus was on earth His spirit was always with His Father for He was "not of this world"; He had no attachment to this world and so He was drawn to heaven by the desire of His spirit.

The germ of divine life which is infused into every Christian soul at baptism has the inherent power to develop to its perfection; to grow, as St. Paul says, "to perfect manhood, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4, 13). Therefore, the counterpart of Christ's Ascension in us, as we re-live His Mysteries,

is the achievement of perfection. This fullness of growth, however, cannot be achieved unless it is first desired. That is why the Rosary begins with the acceptance of the command to love God wholeheartedly, together with the determination to strive energetically to fulfill the obligation of perfection, which is the starting point of spiritual progress.

In intention and desire every Christian must be perfect. His mind and heart are to be sent on in advance to Heaven by his own "Angel Gabriel," that is, by a sincere and firm purpose to strive for sanctity. Then the *gradual accomplishment* of transformation can begin. The divine energies of Faith, Hope and Charity infused in the soul by Baptism are released to commence their work of developing the soul to the perfection of its "species," that is, into the likeness of Christ; "and so grow up in all things in Him Who is the head" (Eph. 4, 15).

This Mystery should teach us that the facility and glory of our spiritual "ascension" will be proportioned to the force

of our desire to be drawn to God and our practical effort to sever any earthly ties that might keep the heart attached to creatures. In order to enjoy "the freedom of the glory of the sons of God" (Rom. 8, 21) the soul must be free of all attachments to earth, for "it is the same thing if a bird be held by a slender cord or a stout one . . . as long as it breaks it not, it flies not away. . . . Thus the soul that has attachment to anything, however much virtue it possesses, will not attain to the liberty of divine union" (St. John of the Cross: *Ascent*, Bk. I, Ch. XI).



3. THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY GHOST UPON THE APOSTLES

The plant having grown to maturity, now produces its fruit. The single seed that was planted in the soil, that died by

the action of the elements in order to come forth into a new life. Now at full growth fulfills all its promise and yields an abundance of fruit in a marvellous exchange for its sacrifice.

So with our Lord. Planted by the Father in the soil of His holy will; crucified by the spirit of the world; risen from the Tomb in new life, He now sends back the abundant harvest of the sanctifying gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit: "The charity of God," says the Apostle, "is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us" (Rom. 5, 5). A glorious exchange that One should die for all to live.

The marvellous effects of the fruits of the Holy Spirit are evident from the transformation of the Apostles. They had spent three years in the company of the Master. They had walked with Him, worked with Him, eaten with Him and listened daily to His divine instructions, yet their judgments were still very human and natural. St. Peter was actually rebuked by our Lord for minding "not the

things of God, but those of men" (Matt. 16, 23). Even after the Resurrection they thought of Christ's kingdom in terms of worldly power and material advantage and asked our Lord, "Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?" (Acts 1, 6). The apostles were not lacking in good will, but they were ignorant and afraid of what was spiritual.

With the infusion of the Holy Ghost they were completely changed. Their eyes were opened to a new world—a glorious world that they had not recognized before—the kingdom of the spirit. Henceforth nothing else mattered. Why had they not understood it when the Master explained it? They needed the Paraclete, as He had told them: "The Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your mind whatever I have said to you" (John 14, 26).

After Pentecost the Apostles went forth fearlessly to proclaim the spiritual reign of the Crucified. They spoke with inspiration and zeal. At last they were real apostles.

We have received the glorious mystery of Pentecost in the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Holy Spirit has come into our souls with the full fruit of salvation. He will transform us too, in spite of all our defects, if we, like the Apostles, are willing to give ourselves over to His divine operations. If we will close our eyes to the attractions of earth, He will open them to the glory of the things of the spirit; if we will abandon the worldly mentality, He will "teach us all things," explaining the Sacred Scriptures that seemed perhaps unintelligible before. If we will turn our affections from the pleasure and power of the kingdom of the world, He will purify and direct them to the kingdom of God. If we but dedicate ourselves to Him, He will make us fearless and zealous Christians, no matter how unlearned, no matter what our state of life.

Reflection on this Mystery should make us yearn to be wholly consumed by the indwelling Holy Spirit, so that we might become "incendiaries of divine love," en-

kindling in the hearts of others the flame of charity as true apostles of Him Who said: "I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I, but, that it be kindled" (Luke 12, 49).



4. THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN INTO HEAVEN

The choicest fruit of the harvest is the first gathered, and so Mary in her glorious Assumption is the first to follow her divine Son, body and soul, into Heaven. Having been the first to plant herself in the soil of God's will in the Annunciation, she is now the first to be taken up in the harvest of Redemption in the name of all her children.

Since Mary was immaculate, it was her privilege not to suffer the corruption of the body, but to be assumed into heaven immediately after death. We who are

tainted with original sin must pay the penalty of bodily decay, but the Mystery of Mary's Assumption is also our Mystery and is to be re-lived by us in a spiritual manner.

Our life in Jesus must be a life *in* and *through* Mary. It was through the Blessed Virgin that Jesus brought the Divine life to us, and it must be by the same channel that our life goes back with Jesus to the Father.

Life in its practical aspect is the summary of our thoughts, words and actions. The constant procession of things for which we are responsible constitutes for each one of us the manifestation of our life. Therefore, if we are to be "taken up" body and soul with Mary, these things must be placed in her hands.

To be assumed with Mary is to consecrate ourselves entirely to her in order to belong wholly to Jesus through her. It is to give her our body with all its members and senses, so that they be used as she would have us use them—for the glory of God; our temporal goods so

that they are not used for mere selfish advantage; our soul with all its powers; our interior and spiritual goods which are our merits and virtues to be spent by her in honor of her Son.

Whatever is placed in Mary's hands she will purify of the stains of self-love, of any attachment to created things which may slip unnoticed into our best actions. She will embellish our works, adorning them with her own merits and virtues, and when they are carried to Heaven in her virginal hands, God will regard not the offering itself, but her by whom it is "taken up."

True devotion to Mary must not be a mere emotion or sentimental admiration; not the recitation of mechanical prayers, as it may become, but a willful and complete self-offering based on the firm Catholic doctrine of Mary's divine and universal motherhood.

Such a consecration and true devotion to Mary is the short, perfect and secure way to Heaven. It is the way chosen by our Lord.

Therefore, the "body and soul" of our actions will be "assumed" with Mary into Heaven when they are truly the actions of a child of Mary; of one whose life is molded in her heart by the power of the Holy Spirit and which bears resemblance to her spiritual features by the studied imitation of her virtues.



5. THE CORONATION OF OUR BLESSED MOTHER IN HEAVEN

The last episode in the story of the grain of wheat is written only when the entire harvest has been gathered in and account made of the plentiful return. So the plan of Redemption is complete only when all the redeemed are incorporated in the kingdom of God under the glorious Queen of Heaven.

In the first mystery of the Rosary, the story of Redemption began with Mary

sowing herself in God's holy will in the name of all her children. Now in the last scene the harvest of salvation is gathered into heaven as Mary is crowned in the name of all her children whom she brings into glory through Christ.

The Mystery of the Coronation of the Blessed Virgin announces the glorious consummation of the plan of God which shall find all things "restored in Christ" through Mary. It proclaims the eternal maturity of the Mystical Body which was conceived and born supernaturally in all its members by the Mother who physically conceived and bore Christ the Head.

As children of Mary, we are born of the royal blood of grace, therefore, we must live worthy of our kingship. The glorious destiny that awaits us should inspire and urge us to engage all our powers and affections in the service of our Lady. The kingdom of the world must no longer hold sway over our hearts for we have been brought under the banner of the Queen of Heaven: "Do not be afraid, little flock," He says, "for it has

pleased your Father to give you a kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms. . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart also will be" (Luke 12, 32-34).

Meditation on the Mystery of the Coronation should carry us in spirit to the kingdom of Heaven prepared for us. If our meditation has the real character of prayer, that is, a raising of the mind and heart to God, it will conduct us now mentally where some day we shall go in reality. It will carry us beyond the things of this life, past the glory of the stars and conduct us in spirit and desire before the throne of God. There we shall learn to see things in their true perspective; to understand God's plan in our regard; to look at this life on earth with the mind of Jesus and Mary. Then we should return from our meditations on the Holy Rosary determined to attain to the harvest of eternal life by sowing ourselves in sacrifice and dying to ourselves in our sufferings, knowing that we shall receive through Mary the "unfading crown of glory" in our own Coronation.

CONCLUSION

"O God, Whose only begotten Son, by His Life, Death and Resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life; grant, we beseech Thee, that meditating on these Mysteries of the most holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain, and obtain what they promise. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

