

The Departure of Mary and the holy Women of Calvary

Although the Blessed Virgin was carried away fainting after the sad meeting with her Son loaded with his cross, yet she soon recovered consciousness; for love, and the ardent desire of seeing him once more, imparted to her a supernatural feeling of strength. Accompanied by her companions she went to the house of Lazarus, which was at the bottom of the town, and where Martha, Magdalen, and many holy women were already assembled. All were sad and depressed, but Magdalen could not restrain her tears and lamentations. They started from this house, about seventeen in number, to make the way of the cross, that is to say, to follow every step Jesus had taken in this most painful journey. Mary counted each footstep, and being interiorly enlightened, pointed out to her companions those places which had been consecrated by peculiar sufferings. Then did the sharp sword predicted by aged Simeon impress for the first time in the heart of Mary that touching devotion which has since been so constantly practised in the Church. Mary imparted it to her companions, and they in their turn left it to future generations,—a most precious gift indeed, bestowed by our Lord on his beloved Mother, and which passed from her heart to the hearts of her children through the revered voice of tradition.

When these holy women reached the house of Veronica they entered it, because Pilate and his officers were at that moment passing through the street, on their way home. They burst forth into unrestrained tears when they beheld the countenance of Jesus imprinted on the veil, and they returned thanks to God for the favour he had bestowed on his faithful servant. They took the jar of aromatic wine which the Jews had prevented Jesus from drinking, and set off together towards Golgotha. Their number was considerably increased, for many pious men and women whom the sufferings of our Lord had filled with pity had joined them, and they ascended the west side of Calvary, as the declivity there was not so great. The Mother of Jesus, accompanied by her niece, Mary (the daughter of Cleophas), John, and Salome went quite up to the round platform; but Martha, Mary of Heli, Veronica,



Johanna Chusa, Susanna, and Mary, the mother of Mark, remained below with Magdalen, who could hardly support herself. Lower down on the mountain there was a third group of holy women, and there were a few scattered individuals between the three groups, who carried messages from one to the other. The Pharisees on horseback rode to and fro among the people, and the five entrances were guarded by Roman soldiers. Mary kept her eyes fixed on the fatal spot, and stood as if entranced,—it was indeed a sight calculated to appal and rend the heart of a mother. There lay the terrible cross, the hammers, the ropes, the nails, and alongside of these frightful instruments to torture stood the brutal executioners, half drunk, and almost without clothing, swearing and blaspheming, whilst making their preparations. The sufferings of the Blessed Virgin were greatly increased by her not being able to see her Son; she knew that he was still alive, and she felt the most ardent desire once more to behold him, while the thought of the torments he still had to endure made her heart ready to burst with grief. A little hail had been falling at times during the morning, but the sun came out again after ten o'clock, and a thick red fog began to obscure it towards twelve.